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THE EXPANSION OF JUDAISM.

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Of all ancient religions, Judaism as represented by the Prophets was incomparably the best. No other religion had such a conception of God, His lofty and upright character, His majesty, His compassion, His fatherly love for men, His mercy, and at the same time, of the high demands for holy living which He made on all who would be His people and enjoy His protection. But this high conception of God was confined to one little people, inhabiting a small province and having little communication with the rest of the world. More than that, their foreign intercourse was so restricted by the many Levitical rules and regulations, that their religious influence on other nations was practically nothing. Everywhere else, there was polytheism, varying in grade from its finest and noblest forms to the crassest, most degraded and degrading. What advantage was it to the world that the Jews had a better religion, since the Levitical law was a barrier that prevented all communication? It looked as if the heathen were to be excluded from having any share in the religious truth in which Israel was so rich. The heirs of the prophets were by no means inclined to share their holy inheritance with the unclean heathen about them.

But there can be no lasting monopoly in truth. Deep and wide as was the gulf that separated the heathen from the Jews, it could be bridged. In spite of the separation, many means of contact and channels of communication were furnished by "the Jews in the Diaspora."

Abraham, their great forefather, was himself a wanderer and in this respect he had many imitators among his children. For centuries the Jews had been spreading beyond Palestine. A constant stream of emigrants was overflowing its boundaries in all directions. At this time there was scarcely a city in all

the world that did not have Jews among its inhabitants. There were great numbers of them in the lands of the Tigris and Euphrates; Asia Minor was overrun by them. Alexandria in Egypt was divided into five districts or wards, two of which were occupied by Jews. In the Nile Delta, it was estimated that there were more than a million Jews. Along the coast of North Africa they were everywhere at home. The towns and cities of Macedonia and Greece contained Jewish colonies. In Rome there were probably thirty thousand of them. The Jew was ubiquitous.

But in their wanderings and long residence in foreign lands, they had undergone a most important change. If a paradox be allowed, they were not only Jews, they had also become Greeks, and consequently were neither Jews nor Greeks. They produced a new culture, a new civilization, composed of the best elements of Judaism and of Hellenism. The civilization of the Jews was in many respects very narrow and limited, but in others lofty and imposing. Its ideal was the knowledge and perfect obedience of the law of God as contained in the Old Testament. It was monotheistic and intensely religious. The Greek civilization was far wider and more varied. It was great in science, literature, and art. But its type was not religious and moral, but intellectual and æsthetic. This new Hellenistic civilization was a union of the two. It got its religion from Judaism, its philosophy and its learning from the Greeks.

These Jews had no thought of becoming anything else than Jews. They were not sensible of any change. They did not feel that there was any difference between them and their brethren in Palestine. They kept up their connection with the Holy Land. Every year thousands of them made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, which still remained for them the Holy City, the only place where they could acceptably offer sacrifice. They regularly sent their yearly contributions to the temple, and, whenever it was possible, they went in person to attend one of the yearly feasts. Besides this, they took their law with them, and wherever they went, they met every Sabbath to study it. Wherever there were Jews there was a synagogue. So by all

these means they kept in touch with their brethren and the traditions of their fathers.

On the other hand, they lived among heathen and were compelled to associate more or less intimately with them. They were brought into close, daily contact with those who were their superiors in refinement and culture. The Jewish mind has always shown a good deal of alertness and receptivity. It was impossible that they should remain insensible to all the beauties of the culture about them. Especially the fine speculations and teachings of the philosophers attracted them, for they seemed to be in harmony with their Scriptures, and even indeed, to express the same truths seen from a different point of view.

They held to the truth of their religion; they tried to keep the law, but it was impossible for them to remain Pharisees. They honored their father Abraham, and Moses. But they came into contact with people who had not Abraham for their father, and were ignorant of the law of Moses, and yet possessed much truth, were virtuous and upright, pursued noble ends, and lived blameless lives. A problem was thrust on them which they had to solve. Will these good people be excluded from the kingdom of God simply because they are not Jews? Their good sense in the end gave them the answer. It led them to distinguish between the truth, and the form in which the truth was expressed. Not the letter of the law was the important thing, but the religious and moral truth which it taught. To be a son of Abraham was a good thing, but truly to fear and honor God was far better. To observe the Mosaic distinctions of clean and unclean was important, but the necessary thing was to preserve a clean heart and live a pure life. In other words, here was a *liberal movement* among the Jews in the Diaspora which was entirely different from the Phariseism of Palestine; and it need hardly be added, much superior to it; for it was a movement from the letter to the spirit, from the form to the contents, from a religion of rites and ceremonies to a religion of the heart.

One of the most imposing things in Jewish literature is the

unshaken confidence that they have the one true God, who will not tolerate the worship of anything else. They learned this with great difficulty, but they learned it well, and it has been to them a source of unlimited strength which centuries of persecution and oppression have not exhausted. While appreciating the good that existed among the heathen, they never ceased to abominate their idolatry. Their zeal for God led them to become missionaries to the heathen about them. We do not think of the Jews as a missionary people, but they have had a most interesting missionary period. For some centuries Judaism made earnest efforts to become a universal religion, to convert the world. But she was finally driven from the mission field by Christianity, which proved to be a too powerful rival; and at the same time, Judaism drew back from the freer movement and settled down into a rigid, legal orthodoxy. In other words, Phariseism prevailed over Hellenism.

The Judaism of Palestine was never attractive to the heathen and hence was not a good missionary religion. Their refusal to eat swine's flesh led Juvenal to speak of Palestine as the land "where the long practiced clemency allowed the hogs to reach a ripe old age." They observed the Sabbath, it was said, because they were lazy and wished to shirk work. Since they had no statues in their temples and synagogues, they were charged with the foolishness of worshipping the clouds. Above all, the heathen were offended that the Jews assumed a superiority and refused to associate with them because they were Levitically unclean. So for many reasons the Jews were despised and even hated.

It would seem then that the Jew could hope for little success in his missionary efforts. But it must be remembered in the first place, that the Jews in the Diaspora were the real missionaries, and that they were already undergoing a radical change in their attitude to the ceremonial law. Consequently their desire to make converts led them to present only the most attractive features of Judaism to the consideration of their hearers. They took from the Old Testament a few great ideas, *the essentials of their religion*, and laid all emphasis on these.

In the first place, they held strongly to the truth that there is but one God. They thereby introduced into the natural world, into history, and into religion, the principle of unity. The heathen thought of the world as the play-ground of malicious gods and spirits, which were lying in wait for an opportunity to play some mad prank in the realm of nature, cross the plans and purposes of some other god, or inflict an injury on some unsuspecting and helpless mortal. To the thoughtful heathen it was a great relief to learn that there is one all-wise and powerful God, who made and controls the universe.

And then the lofty conception of God which was presented, was attractive. He was so great and majestic, so high and spiritual, that it was an offense even to try to represent Him by anything material. No picture or statue was allowed; such things could only hinder and not help the mind in its attempt to conceive of Him and His glory.

They made much of the doctrine of rewards and punishments in a future state. This God, so just and holy, is interested in His creatures and will reward or punish each one according to his life. The upright, the pure and noble will receive at His hand the rewards for their conduct, while to the wicked will be meted out the just punishments for their disregard of His holy will.

One of the commonest and deepest feelings of the human heart is the sense of ill desert before God. The conscience is oppressed and burdened, and longs for some sure way of conciliating an offended God. The soul longs for certainty in religious matters. The current philosophy of the day was doing much to awaken and deepen this sense of sin. People felt their religious needs as never before. Of all ancient religions, Judaism offered the most satisfying symbolical rites and ceremonies of purification, and the most comforting assurances of the merciful and forgiving character of God. In one sense, these Jews in the Diaspora, were the true successors of the Prophets, for like them they disregarded the letter of the law, and taught that a humble and penitent heart and a blameless, helpful life are what God requires.

Of the personal, individual labors of these missionaries, their conversations, arguments, exhortations, and pleadings, we know almost nothing for they found no biographer. But of their burning zeal and far-reaching activity we can form a good estimate if we look at their literary productions. They made use of every known form of literature to recommend Judaism and make its teachings known. For three centuries they produced a rich and varied missionary literature. It is impossible to describe this in detail, but we should, at least, take a brief review of its most important features. It will serve the double purpose of showing their missionary zeal and the change which Greek influences had produced among them.

They translated the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek. That was by no means simply for the benefit of the Jews themselves, they had the heathen also in view. Just as the Scriptures are now translated into various languages and used as means of advancing the missionary work, so the Old Testament was rendered into Greek that the heathen might more easily learn the religion of Israel. Some expressions that would be offensive to Greek taste and conceptions, were omitted or altered, and various changes were made, all of which sprang out of one motive, the desire to make their religion more attractive to the heathen.

To further the same purpose, they wrote commentaries on the Scriptures, in which they were explained in accordance with the best teachings of the philosophers, and to please the Greek taste. They did not ask what the literal meaning of a passage is, but by the allegorical method of interpretation, derived from it whatever teaching they desired. For instance, the story of the creation was given in philosophical form. The command to abstain from swine's flesh, it was said, is not to be understood literally. God had not intended that it should be, but He had meant thereby to teach that they should not associate with those who are like swine, brutish and impure in character. In this way they got rid of all the troublesome commands in the ceremonial law, and at the same time, made it appear to be a most wise and ingenious piece of legislation, an inexhaustible source of practical wisdom.

Closely akin to these commentaries were their philosophical works, inasmuch as these were often based on some section of scripture, or at least, treated the Old Testament as the source of all philosophy. The same allegorical method was used, and Moses and the prophets were made to appear as the true philosophers, with whom Plato, Aristotle and the others agreed in so far as they had uttered the truth. In this way the first place and the highest honors were vindicated to Judaism. These philosophical works all have this characteristic which distinguishes them from the works of the Greek philosophers, namely: they all have a practical, moral, and religious object in view. The Greeks pursued knowledge for its own sake; the Jews, for the influence it would have on the character and life. They made philosophy the handmaid of religion, for it was its function to make men better, to help them to a truly religious life.

The Jews were proud of their history. They believed that God's hand was visible in it all. Hence, it was inevitable that they would use it, too, for missionary purposes. And so, in fact, we find that a great many histories of the Jews were written, in all of which there is a more or less pronounced Chauvinism. They all pursued the same end, the glorification of Israel. They all seek to show that the Jews have worshiped the true God who has cared for them in the most remarkable way, and therefore they have played a great rôle in the history of the world. As a nation, they have a long and glorious past, because they stand in an intimate relation to the God of all the earth.

Epic poetry and the drama were also used to acquaint the heathen with Judaism, and to fill them with enthusiasm for Judea's history and religion. As Homer had sung of Troy and her fate, so Philo, the epic poet, wrote the history of Jerusalem and her kings in the form of a great epic poem. Still more remarkable is the fact that the history of Israel was dramatized. Just as the Greek dramatists had chosen some great and decisive event in the history of their country for the subject of their greatest dramas, and thereby held up their history for the admiration of the world, so the Jews competed for praise and honor for their land by presenting its history in the same fas-

cinating way. We have fragments of one of these plays which was called "The Exodus," and, as its name indicates, was a dramatization of the Biblical story of the exodus from Egypt. Thus even the theater was compelled to assist in the missionary work of the Jews.

But they found opponents who attacked them and made many severe charges against them. That shows that these missionary efforts were so strong and persistent that the heathen found it necessary to defend themselves and their religion, which they did by attacking the Jews. These must be refuted, and so we find Jewish apologists writing in defense of their religion and people, and refuting at great length all the charges made against them. Two of these are especially worthy of notice. The Jews were charged with being a modern people, without a history, and consequently they had contributed nothing to the civilization of the world. To disprove that they put forth the most strenuous efforts. They sought for proofs from every quarter to show that they were as old as any of the peoples then existing. And they do not hesitate to declare that the Jews had been the source of *all* culture and civilization. For Abraham had taught the Egyptians astrology, Joseph had introduced a new system of irrigation and agriculture, Moses was the real father of all learning, for he was the first great philosopher, and had invented the alphabet, and written the Pentateuch which was the greatest of all philosophical works. He had lived long before any of the great men of the Greeks, who had derived all their knowledge from him, without giving him the proper credit.

Not content with all these efforts, they even made use of forgeries to increase the reputation and authority of their religion. The Sibyls were mysterious prophetesses that were held in great reverence by the heathen. It was very shrewd on the part of these missionaries to make use of the name of the Sibyl to propagate the Jewish faith, for anything that she might utter would at once receive the most ready credence. So in the second century B. C., we find that some pious Jew wrote a work which purported to be by a Sibyl. In the prologue she was made to say that she was a daughter of Noah(!), that she had been with him in the

ark at the time of the flood, that she had then come from Babylon, and that the Greeks had given her a false name. She then foretells the glories of Solomon's kingdom, and really gives in the form of a prophecy the history of the Jews, of the Greeks, and of the Romans down to about the year 140 B. C. In all this the Jews are represented as the people of God, to whom is promised the Messiah, and all the other nations are threatened with destruction unless they repent and join the Jews in the worship of God. These prophecies of the Sibyls were widely read and undoubtedly had great influence. Vergil and Tacitus had read them and made use of them in their writings. Under the names of the greatest Greek poets and philosophers, they also forged poems and histories in which these are made to teach the purest Jewish doctrines and sound forth the praises of the true people of God.

This is certainly enough to show that the Jews were tremendously in earnest in their efforts to convert the world. Such a varied and eager missionary activity will compare favorably with that of any other religion. They bade high for popular favor, and left no stone unturned to reach the heathen masses. Their efforts were not without success. The influence of the Jews on the heathen world was far greater than has generally been supposed. Many heathen became proselytes. They were circumcised, observed the whole law and lived entirely as Jews. These were called "proselytes of righteousness." But a far larger number were influenced by their religious teachings, but yet hesitated to take this important step. They were willing to observe some of the law, but in its entirety it was too exacting and burdensome. Many of these observed the Sabbath and some of the requirements in regard to meats, and with this the Jews seem to have been satisfied. These were called "God fearing" or "devout."¹

But there were many that were influenced by the teachings of the Jews, who refused to accept any of these burdensome and

¹ These and similar phrases were used to designate this class. Thus Cornelius, Acts x.2, is called "a devout man and one that feared God." Cf. Acts xiii.50, "the devout women," xvi.14, "one that feared God." These were not called "proselytes of the gate;" this phrase was applied simply to heathen who lived in Palestine.

inconvenient restrictions. They learned much from the Jews. We might even say they got the true religion from them. They were careful to receive the truth and to frame their lives in accordance with it. But the ceremonial part of Judaism was repellent to them, and furthermore, they saw that it was not necessary.

From what has been said, it will be seen that the influence of the Jews on the heathen was great and good, converting many of them wholly to a high type of Judaism and giving many others a better knowledge of God and of His character. Every synagogue was as a light set in a dark place, and about each of these were gathered many heathen seeking the truth and worshipping with more or less purity the God of Israel. The scattering of the Jews throughout all lands was in this way a blessing, for they were instrumental in spreading abroad a higher conception of God and purer moral standards, thus helping on the religious education and development of the world, and preparing it for the reception of Christianity.